

it's only more and more --
man is trapped in himself,
he may go to the stars
but takes in his bag of seeds
his murderous desires.

-- Harold Witt

Orinda CA

MY AUNT BEA

I thought of her last night,
as I watched Maureen Stapleton
steal the show in Interiors
(the first funny movie
Woody Allen's ever made).
Bea was married to my Uncle Orville,
who had been married before.
They were on my father's side of the family,
the Asbury First Methodist side,
so divorce was theoretically permissible,
although in fact people simply didn't do it.
Worse yet, Bea was a Catholic,
or strictly speaking, an ex-Catholic,
since by her marriage to a divorced man,
she had excommunicated herself.

In those days in Upstate New York,
relations between Catholics and Protestants
were just a little more strained
than in Mid-16th Century England.
I can't remember my maternal aunts and uncles
ever being in the same room at the same time
with my paternal aunts and uncles.
Probably my memory's just bad,
but you can be sure the word "ecumenical"
was on the tip of damn few tongues,
and I can remember being forbidden by the parish priest
to serve as escort to a flower girl
at a protestant neighbor's wedding.
There were some mighty pissed-off people over that one.

But Bea bit her thumb at excommunication.
She still went to Midnight Mass on Christmas Eve
and to any other Mass or service,
Catholic, Protestant, or Jewish,
she damn well pleased,

and you could tell that to her
the most preposterous notion in the world
was that she was destined for hellfire
from having brought sexual happiness
to her quiet, respectable, considerate,
and very successful businessman husband.
Not to mention having borne and raised
his two strapping sons.

Indeed she was the first unabashedly sexual person
I was to come in contact with.
Turned early prudish by nuns and other Christian women,
I was shocked to hear Bea
send her husband off to the office
with an admonition that he hurry home to her bed.
She had one of the few fine bosoms
on the Eastern Seaboard
and was always all hugs and kisses for everyone.
Trained as a nurse, she could heal a little boy's hurt,
or a big boy's, lickety-split.
She was what I guess you'd call a real woman
at a time when the species was endangered.

I still get warm notes from Bea at Christmas.
The protestant side of the family,
to which I'd never been especially close,
sort of unilaterally adopted me
when I got divorced.

And Bea is always trying to get my mother
to come visit her and Orv
in the condominium to which they've retired in Florida.
But Bea makes my mother nervous;
Bea always made my mother nervous.

DECADENT

-- with nods to r. gilman and c. stetler

he was not even bestial.
he preferred billy graham to baudelaire.
when rome fell to migrating herds of bison,
he was up as usual, bright and early,
chanting matins.
oscar wilde could have recited his entire
repertoire of wit
before our hero could complete
a sentence without a cliché.